

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

February 1, 2019

The Honorable Dr. Benjamin S. Carson  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
451 7th Street SW  
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Secretary Carson:

We write with frustration and alarm regarding the Department's response to decrepit housing conditions in Hartford, Connecticut, and elsewhere, as recently highlighted in a report by NBC News and an article from the Hartford Courant. The NBC News report focused on the Infill Apartments—a fifty-two unit complex in Hartford. On February 1, 2018, the property received a Real Estate Assessment Center (REAC) score of 27, a score that is well below the threshold for failing REAC scores, which is 59.

The Courant article highlighted issues at Barbour Gardens, an eighty-four unit complex, which scored an 81 in a February 2018 inspection. Yet by September, the same complex was flagged for over 200 code violations by the City of Hartford. These abstract numbers represent very real and deleterious conditions that jeopardize the health and well-being of residents, and in the case of Barbour Gardens, shows a severe lack of oversight of the quality of REAC scores. Most recently, the property scored 9 out of 100 on an inspection that was completed in October 2018.

As you know, any failing score immediately triggers enforcement powers the Department can use to address decrepit housing conditions. Moreover, the FY2017 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations law contained language to enhance the Department's enforcement powers. For instance, if certain conditions are not met, the Department can require the project management of a failing property to be replaced, impose civil penalties, and abate Section 8 contracts. The Department can also transfer the project owner and take any other regulatory or contractual remedies the secretary deems necessary and appropriate.

Given the broad enforcement powers at the Department's disposal, we find the failure to fully and promptly exercise those powers to address the deplorable conditions at the Infill Apartments and Barbour Gardens at best troubling and at worst inexcusable. We respectfully ask you to explain the repeated delays in enforcement actions against the Infill Apartments' property owners so we can work with you to ensure such delays do not happen again. We are also asking for an explanation for the huge disparity between the February REAC inspection of Barbour Gardens' to the City's September inspection to better understand how HUD controls for the quality of such inspections.

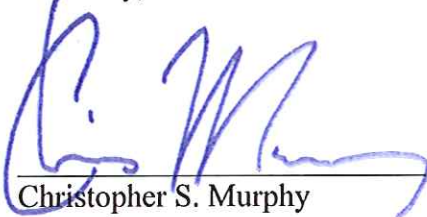
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More broadly, the issues plaguing these properties may point to broader issues endemic to the Department's inspection processes, on which hinges the integrity of the Department's enforcement system. With that in mind, we respectfully ask you to answer the following questions regarding said processes:

1. What actions have HUD taken against the landlords of both Infill and Barbour Gardens? What is the current timeline for corrective actions and what options for relocation are being considered for residents? Will residents who are requesting relocation be allocated vouchers?
2. How do you ensure the quality of your inspectors?
3. What type of training does HUD provide for inspectors, and are certified inspectors required to complete continuing education?
4. What is the standard procedure for de-certifying an inspector, and can a de-certified inspector become re-apply for certification? If so, when?
5. When did the Department last conduct a comprehensive review of its inspection review processes and adjusted its inspection processes accordingly?
6. The Departmental Enforcement Center (DEC) in the Office of the General Counsel was originally created within the Department to address severe delays in enforcement actions. What role did DEC play—if any—in addressing delays in enforcement actions at the Infill Apartments?

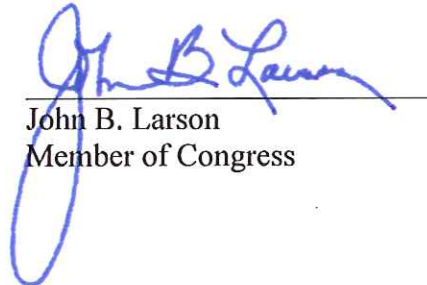
We share your goal of ensuring that families are not forced to live in housing that is neither safe nor healthy. We look forward to your prompt response and to working with you to immediately remedy the squalid conditions at the Infill Apartments, Barbour Gardens, and at other sites across Connecticut.

Sincerely,




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Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



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John B. Larson  
Member of Congress



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Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator